

Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 and IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 1017

Dear Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Dan Fox, Senator Rob Sampson, Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, I am the Executive Director for the YWCA New Britain. Our mission is the elimination of racism and the empowerment of women. Passing election reform through HB 6578 increases voter access that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation. My agency supports legislation that will make the 2020 absentee ballot drop boxes permanent, will expand Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies, and will restore voting rights to people on parole. These efforts move Connecticut closer to a more just and equitable state.

This bill which codifies AVR using the Dept. of Motor Vehicles into state law. However, we also support the expansion of **AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies**. We work with many individuals who do not drive and can't afford a license. Many are receiving benefits through other state agencies and programs. Expanding AVR to those programs and agencies will greatly improve voter registration across all sectors of our community.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) **will improve accuracy and efficiency in the election process** by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registration thus **delivering the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns**. **Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.**

77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Across the country, localities have **saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration** by moving from a paper to an electronic method. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to the YWCA because **disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state disproportionately impacting people of color**. New Britain is one community with a higher proportion of residents who are on parole. The current system negatively impacts our community and others like it.

Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Furthermore, **felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power**. 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just two weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole. It is important that Connecticut join it's more progressive neighbors.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is necessary so that voters **retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes**. The pandemic demonstrated the security and effectiveness of this system. I used it in my hometown of Bristol and felt assured that the locked box outside of city hall was both a safe and secure way to vote.

Sincerely, 
Tracey Madden-Hennessey
Executive Director

for every woman